



# The Civil War Post

Patricia A. Kaufmann

## Dr. William Davis Ewing - Lynchburg, Va., Wayside Hospital

It is a small note (4 by 1 ½ inches) written on the front and back by William Davis Ewing, asking that some clothes and a trunk – only if it can be locked – be sent to him by express and to be sure to get a receipt, should the shipment be lost. He instructs the shipment to be directed to “W. D. Ewing, Wayside Hospital, Care of Dr. Bass, Surgeon in Charge.” He states, “I am in no hurry only I will want some sundy (sic) cloths (sic) in the spring if I live...”

It is unclear whether this note was included with a longer letter or if it was a small hand-delivered missive out of the mails (Figures 1 and 2).

Dr. Ewing is afraid of his clothes being stolen, as that seems to have been a common problem in the camps. In a letter written home on April 15, 1863, he says in part,<sup>1</sup>

“We have more trouble with Louisianians than all the balance together. A few nights ago one fellow came with 73 sick whose name was not on the list. He started away in the night taking with him some of the others clothes. The fool got on the cars at Charlottesville with about 35 others. After they had all gotten supper, Dr. Bass, Dr. Vasin & myself were going around & discovered him. Dr. Bass sent for the guard & had him arrested but found no stolen clothes. He was sent back the next day to his regt. under guard. We have found since that it was the fourth time he had been sent from different hospitals to the guard house.”

### Wayside hospitals

Wayside hospitals were formed across the South during the Civil War as means to care for sick and wounded Confederate soldiers traveling throughout the South.

Usually situated at depots or other railroad stopping points, wayside facilities provided a range of services to soldiers in transit. Most offered meals and basic nursing, while larger wayside hospitals contained overnight accommodations and

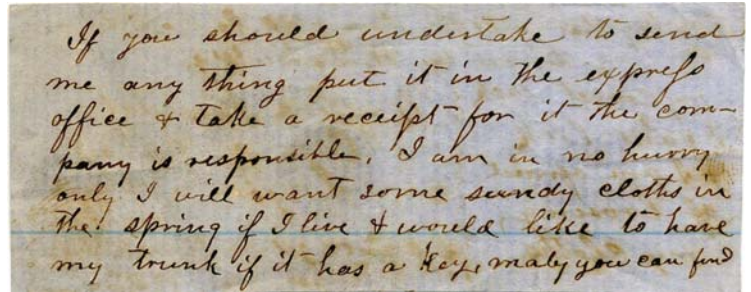


Figure 1. Front of small note written by William Davis Ewing asking that clothes and a trunk be sent to him by express.

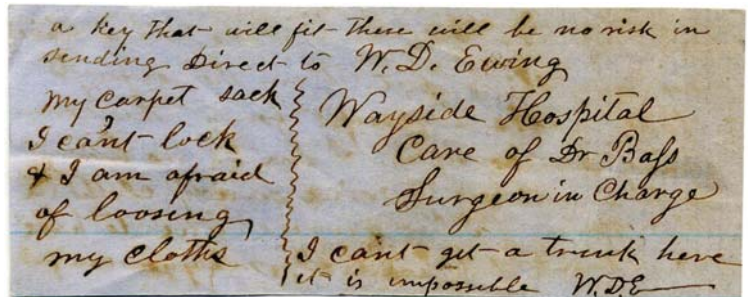


Figure 2. Back of the note on which Ewing instructs shipment to be directed to “W. D. Ewing, Wayside Hospital, Care of Dr. Bass, Surgeon in Charge.”

were staffed with physicians or surgeons. All wayside hospitals originated through private means, usually the efforts of local women and relief organizations. Although a few larger facilities were eventually placed under the supervision of Confederate medical authorities, all wayside hospitals depended, in large measure, on private donations of food, clothing, bandages, medicine and labor.

Patients were transported to the Lynchburg Wayside Hospital from battlefields such as Seven Pines and the Wilderness. Facing a shortage of military hospitals and competent military physicians, as early as July 30, 1861, Lynchburg citizens were offering to care for ill soldiers in their homes.

By war’s end, nearly 20,000 sick and injured had rolled into Lynchburg for treatment in the city’s large 32-building hospital system. Sadly, Lynchburg’s City Cemetery became the

Figure 3. A Lynchburg Confederate Hospital, which has since been torn down.



final destination of more than 2,700 Union and Confederate souls.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of numbers, no city other than Richmond, Va. had more Confederate hospitals. Three rail lines terminated in Lynchburg: Virginia & Tennessee Railroad from the southwest, the Orange & Alexandria Railroad from the north and the Southside Railroad from Richmond.

The City of Lynchburg, in the four years of the Civil War, became a living hospital laboratory, testing the efficiency of an overwhelmed medical system to see if the hospital concept could progress from its reputation as a place where people went to die to a place where people went to recover and return home.<sup>3</sup>

### Dr. William Davis Ewing

William Davis Ewing, M.D. (1829-1902) was born at the Ewing homestead “The Grove,” located three miles west of Harrisonburg, Va. At the age of 20, he attended Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) during the term 1849-50. The school records show he had a course in general chemistry with a grade of 5.5, rhetoric 5.67, freshman math 4.94, natural philosophy 6.42, behavior 7.

According to the Alumni Association, University of Virginia, records show Ewing attended the Medical College 1852-53. Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, Pa., reported he was a graduate in the class of 1854, receiving an M.D. degree.

Davis moved to Augusta County in 1855, apparently on a farm with his sisters near Mount Horeb Presbyterian Church and practiced his profession. He married Margaret Ann Sellers (1833-1915) at the bride’s residence, Spring Farm, on Oct. 24, 1859.

Early in the war, Dr. Ewing enlisted at Staunton, Va., Aug. 2, 1861, in Company G, 52nd Infantry; he was assigned to hospital duty in Winchester, Va. On May 14, 1863, he was relieved from hospital duty (Special Order 131-5 Dept. & Army - No. Va. - Gen. Robt. E. Lee) and, in August 1863, he was detailed to regimental duty in General Early’s division. Despite his medical status as a physician, records show he was a hospital steward during much – if not all – of the war.

On Sept. 19, 1864, he was captured at Winchester, Va. According to Ewing family history, he was held as “surgeon to wounded Confederates for about four months” and, on Jan. 19, 1865, was in the U.S. Army General Hospital, (West’s Buildings Hospital) Baltimore, Md. Likely, this is a misinterpretation by those not acquainted with how military archives are recorded. Dr. F. Terry Hambrecht notes Ewing was a prisoner of war while (Confederate) “Asst. Surgeon,” West’s Buildings Hospital, Baltimore, Md – something Dr. Hambrecht disputes.

As is not uncommon, there is confusion and conflicting online information regarding Ewing.<sup>4</sup> In the online *Journal of Clan Ewing*, there is much biographical data on Dr. W.D.



Figure 4. Two Lynchburg Confederate hospitals, one in ruins in the foreground and the last surviving is in the background.

Ewing,<sup>5</sup> as well as in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), but it conflicts with that of Dr. F. Terry Hambrecht of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine in Frederick, Md.

In the unpublished database of Dr. F.T. Hambrecht and J.L. Koste,<sup>6</sup> Terry Hambrecht notes that when Ewing was captured by U.S. Army troops near the end of the war, Dr. Ewing is noted as a Confederate assistant surgeon. And that is what it says in his military records at NARA. Although he was appointed as a Confederate hospital steward, no evidence was found by Hambrecht that Ewing was appointed as an Assistant Surgeon by a Confederate Secretary of War. I did not search those records, but Terry is very systematic in his research and I’ve little doubt he is likely correct.<sup>7</sup>

Hambrecht further notes that “a person named ‘William D. Ewing’ from Rose Hill, Lee Co., Va., attended Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, Pa., 1854-1855. His preceptor was Dr. Joshua Ewing. This person is probably the William D. Ewing who received an M.D. degree from Jefferson Medical College in 1861 and practiced medicine in Lee Co., VA. The subject physician appears to have served the Confederacy as a Pvt., Co. F, 7th VA Cavalry, but not in a medical capacity.”

On this point I disagree and believe this is indeed the same Ewing who graduated from Jefferson Medical College, based on a published letter from the same Ewing in which he says,

“I got a letter from Daniel yesterday advising me to go to Richmond before the examining board to get a commission. I have not yet made up my mind to try it for various reasons. 1st I have been so well treated here by Dr. Bass & my situation is so much more comfortable here than field service & then 2ndly if I should be unsuccessful before the medical board. I know my examination will be more rigid having graduated in the North. It would be a great mortification to me to fail. Besides I would likely loose (sic) my place

Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8 (from left).

(CONFEDERATE.)  
E 52 Va.  
*William D. Ewing*  
Capt., Co. G, 52 Reg't Virginia Infantry.  
Appears on  
Company Muster Roll\*  
of the organization named above,  
for *April 30 to Oct. 31, 1862*  
*not dated*  
Enlisted:  
When *Aug 2*, 186  
Where *Richmond*  
By whom *W. G. Harman*  
Period *1862*  
Last paid:  
By whom *G. M. Cochran*  
To what time *Feb 23*, 186  
Present or absent *Absent*  
Remarks: *Absent on duty*  
*Asst Surgeon*  
The 52d Regiment Virginia Infantry was organized for State service August 15, 1861, for 12 months. (1st) Company B was detached to R. O. No. 106, A. & I. Co. Co., dated September 28, 1861, and finally became Capt. Donnelly's Company Virginia Light Artillery. Another company which entered April 9, 1862, was added as Company B. The regiment was reorganized for the Confederate States service May 1, 1862.  
\*From only made in the M. & O. office, War Department, in October 1863) of an original record borrowed from the State Librarian, Richmond, Va.—M. S. 1077995.  
Book mark:  
*C. Klau*  
(612) 1478 Copyst.

(CONFEDERATE.)  
E 52 Va.  
*William D. Ewing*  
Capt., Co. G, 52 Reg't Va. Infantry.  
Appears on  
Company Muster Roll  
of the organization named above,  
for *Nov. 1. Dec. 1862*  
*not dated*  
Enlisted:  
When *Aug 2*, 186  
Where *Richmond*  
By whom *W. G. Harman*  
Period *1862*  
Last paid:  
By whom *G. M. Cochran*  
To what time *Feb 23*, 186  
Present or absent *Absent*  
Remarks: *Absent detailed on*  
*hospital duty 1st April 1862*  
*Name appears in Column of*  
*Names Present as Dr. William*  
*D. Ewing*  
The 52d Regiment Virginia Infantry was organized for State service August 15, 1861, for 12 months. (1st) Company B was detached to R. O. No. 106, A. & I. Co. Co., dated September 28, 1861, and finally became Capt. Donnelly's Company Virginia Light Artillery. Another company which entered April 9, 1862, was added as Company B. The regiment was reorganized for the Confederate States service May 1, 1862.  
Book mark:  
*C. Klau*  
(612) 1487 Copyst.

(CONFEDERATE.)  
E 52 Va.  
*William D. Ewing*  
Capt., Co. G, 52 Reg't Va. Infantry.  
Appears on  
Company Muster Roll  
of the organization named above,  
for *Jan. 7. Feb*  
*not dated*, 1863.  
Enlisted:  
When *Aug 2*, 186  
Where *Richmond*  
By whom *W. G. Harman*  
Period *1862*  
Last paid:  
By whom *Capt Cochran*  
To what time *Feb 23*, 1863.  
Present or absent *Absent*  
Remarks: *Detailed as Hospital*  
*Absent April 1st 1862*  
The 52d Regiment Virginia Infantry was organized for State service August 15, 1861, for 12 months. (1st) Company B was detached to R. O. No. 106, A. & I. Co. Co., dated September 28, 1861, and finally became Capt. Donnelly's Company Virginia Light Artillery. Another company which entered April 9, 1862, was added as Company B. The regiment was reorganized for the Confederate States service May 1, 1862.  
Book mark:  
*C. Klau*  
(612) 1487 Copyst.

(Confederate.)  
E 52 Va.  
*W. D. Ewing*  
*Richmond 52 Reg't Va*  
Appears on  
Roll of Prisoners of War  
transferred from West's Buildings Hospital, Baltimore, Md., to Fortress Monroe, Va., January 25, 1865.  
Roll dated *not dated*, 186  
Where captured *Richmond, Va.*  
When captured *Sept 19*, 1864.  
Remarks:  
Number of roll:  
41  
*J. M. Wilkinson*  
Copyst.

here. I don't believe I would upon the whole better myself much. If I was sure I would be sent back to this hospital, I would try the trip as a venture but commission a fellow who has been in the field & he has to go back again. I wish you would look in my trunk & see if you can find a certificate from Dr. Gesner Harrison given me from him when at the Medical lecture at the University Va. in 1853. If I go to Richmond I will take that with me & take good care not to show it unless they ask me for papers."

It is clear from this letter that this is the same Ewing who wrote the subject note and that, although Ewing had clearly graduated from medical school and was a practicing physician, he preferred being a hospital steward to the grim task of being a surgeon in the field.

Figures 5-8 show Ewing's military records at NARA. In them, he is logged as an "Assistant Surgeon." But is it possible that Dr. Bass and others at Lynchburg Wayside Hospital were making use of him in that capacity while he was not officially so appointed? It is clear from the partial letter quoted that he had no desire to be a physician in the field.

Ewing is noted as "Absent detailed on Hospital duty 1st April 1862" and "Name appears in Column of Names Present as Dr. William D. Ewing." Another record shows him specifically "Detailed as Hospital Steward April 1st 1862." A third muster roll for the period April 30 to Oct. 31, 1862, notes him as, "Absent on duty (as) Ass't Surgeon." So officially appointed or not, he seemed to have been acting in that capacity.

The Roll of Prisoners of War records him as "Asst Surgeon 52 Regt Va." I believe this was misinterpreted by family geneal-

ogy researchers as Ewing doing duty as a surgeon in a Union hospital. The records are simply stating his title / rank as a Confederate assistant surgeon, which is clearly in dispute.

On Feb. 2, 1865, Ewing was at Camp Hamilton, Fortress Monroe, for flag of truce point of exchange steamer. His prison stint was over.

After the war, Dr. Ewing practiced medicine for nearly 40 years at Slate Hill Farm located 1½ miles east of Weyers Cave, Va. He died of Bright's disease in 1902 (chronic inflammation of the kidneys, AKA chronic nephritis).

We are left to wonder whether Dr. Ewing ever got his lockable trunk and clothes. Despite his understandable remark "if I live," we know that he managed to see the dawn of a new century.

**Endnotes**

1. Letter from Ewing, William Davis, Civil War Voices: Soldier Studies. [www.soldierstudies.org/index.php?action=view\\_letter&Letter=529/](http://www.soldierstudies.org/index.php?action=view_letter&Letter=529/) Accessed Sept. 28, 2018.
2. "Tobacco Town" to Hospital Hub, Lynchburg in the Civil War, <https://sandusky-digitalhistory.wordpress.com/contact/civil-war-medicine/> Accessed Sept. 28, 2018.
3. Michael Bedsworth, *Confederate Hospitals in Lynchburg, Virginia*, Carriage House Inn Bed & Breakfast, [www.thecarriagehouseinnbandb.com/confederate-hospitals-lynchburg-virginia/](http://www.thecarriagehouseinnbandb.com/confederate-hospitals-lynchburg-virginia/) Accessed Sept. 28, 2018.
4. 1863: William Davis Ewing to Margaret Anne (Sellers) Ewing, <https://spared-shared16.wordpress.com/2018/02/25/1863-william-davis-ewing-to-margaret-ann-sellers-ewing/> Accessed Sept. 28, 2018.
5. *Journal of Clan Ewing*, [Vol 1 No 3 Feb 1995, page 22], [www.ewingfamilyassociation.org/journal/Document\\_JoOnline\\_1.html/](http://www.ewingfamilyassociation.org/journal/Document_JoOnline_1.html/) accessed Sept. 28, 2018.
6. Dr. William Davis Ewing, [www.findagrave.com/memorial/22106207/william-davis-ewing/](http://www.findagrave.com/memorial/22106207/william-davis-ewing/) Accessed Sept. 28, 2018.
7. Hambrecht, E.T. & Koste, J.L., *Biographical register of physicians who served the Confederacy in a medical capacity*, 01/28/2016, unpublished database, Marlin Diehl, Michael Angelo and Bob Krick provided input to this biography. Find A Grave Memorial 22106207, [www.findagrave.com/memorial/22106207/william-davis-ewing/](http://www.findagrave.com/memorial/22106207/william-davis-ewing/) Accessed Sept. 28, 2018.